



The Epic of Golf

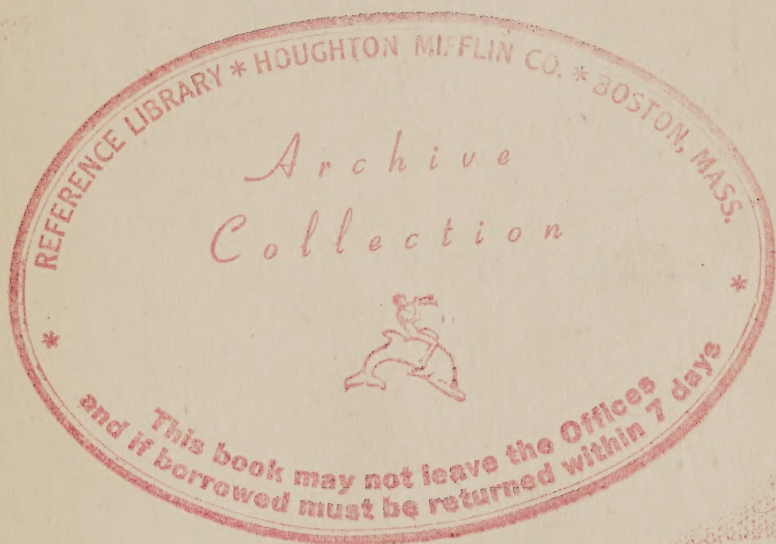
by

Clinton Scollard

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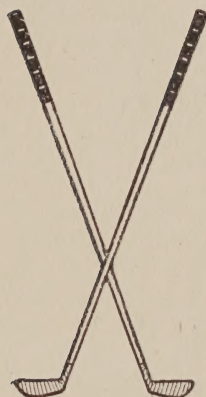
THE EPIC OF GOLF



SPRING'S FIRST BALL

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BY
CLINTON SCOLLARD



BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
The Riverside Press Cambridge
1923

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The Riverside Press

CAMBRIDGE : MASSACHUSETTS

PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

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THE EPIC OF GOLF



CANTO I

INITIATION

CANTO I.

I

UPON the morning of a tonic day
When kingcups danced along the banks of May,
By what is now an unremembered lure
I was won forth the game of Golf to play.

II

It is a joy to see the eager Spring
Stride o'er the land with flowery triumphing;
 "Who loves it not," I thought, "at soul is poor,
As for the game—that's quite another thing!"

III

UNTO a spot they called the "tee," we went,
With many a strange and uncouth implement;
My sponsor builded up a little sand
And placed the ball, and then looked well content.

IV

THERE was a place afar they dubbed "the green,"
Beyond a grassy, rillet-cut ravine ;
 "That's the first hole !" with gracious wave of hand,
My friend assured me as I scanned the scene.

V

UPON the ball he fixed a steadfast eye,
And, with a desperate air of do or die,

Wagged twice or thrice with his long club of wood,
And next with all his might and main let fly.

VI

I WATCHED intent to mark the smitten sphere
Ascend and plunge upon its far career;

But like an old-time falcon loosed from hood,
It swooped ravine-ward sudden, swift and sheer.

VII

THEN straightway burst the Maytime air upon
Words, loud and lurid words, one after one;

I was discovering early, I avow,
How vivid is the golfer's lexicon.

VIII

“TRY it!” my friend cried, and I seemed to see
Within his glance malicious augury.

“One can but try,” I said, with placid brow,
And bravely I stepped out upon the tee.



WORDS, LOUD AND LURID WORDS

IX

'Twas thus, and thus, and thus he bade me do;
I asked demurely, "Must I follow you?"

He cocked at me a sharp suspicious eye,
Then answered with a gibberish term or two.

X

I BRACED myself as though I were a wall;
I looked with fiendish fierceness on the ball;
 I held my breath; I did not dare to sigh;
I smote—the empty air! and that was all.

XI

UPON my ear there fell a choking sound; . . .

Again I swung with energy profound,

And now—and now—but stay! I must confess
Like a Bœotian ox I plowed the ground.

XII

THREE times—no doubt you wot the saying well;
I hugged it to my heart a little spell,
And then essayed once more, and lo, no less
Than what appeared to be a miracle!

XIII

FOR with a crack, belike the crack o' doom,
The ball went shooting, as a fleck of spume
Caught by the wind goes spinning through the air
When day grows dark, and breakers thunder "doom!"

XIV

It curvetted ; it leaped ; it seemed to prance
As though in the delirium of a dance
 Until upon the green it rested fair,
Flinging a challenge in the face of chance.

XV

“A FLUKE!” he cried, his jealousy revealed;
“Truly,” I murmured, and his pride was healed.

A fluke it was beyond a shade of doubt,
But from that day and hour my fate was sealed.

XVI

I FELT the fact within my inmost bones;
I made confession; — “Sooth, the game atones!
I am prepared to face them bravely out,
The scoffs of Simpson and the jeers of Jones!”

XVII

WE played, and all a golfer should not do
I did, until I wore a heated hue;

Plunging persistently from pit to pit
If so it chanced there was a pit in view.

XVIII

I PULLED, I sliced, I foozled, and, in fine,
The path was blazed — the divots were the sign —
Where I had passed, but when I fairly hit
The battered sphere, what ecstasy was mine!



I PULLED, I SLICED, I FOOZLED

XIX

“WELL,” cried my friend, when finally we came
To the last hole, “What think you of the game?”

With eye dispassionate I scanned the course,
And boldly turned and said, “Put up my name!”

XX

THEN I bethought me (strange I should recall,
Since it has naught to do with golf at all!)

That something Scotch appealed to me with force —
The inspiration of the Scotch “high ball.”

XXI

THAT night the one whose heart with mine in tune
Beat happily, addressed me as a loon;

And who will marvel when I say my speech
Revolved about the jigger and the spoon?

XXII

IN visions then did I with Vardon vie;
And, as I lay, there seemed to be no "lie"
Beyond the wondrous prowess of my reach
With any iron that I chose to try.

CANTO II

PARTICIPATION

CANTO II

XXIII

AND now behold me, since the die was cast,
More sore perplexed than ever in the past;
My complement of clubs I needs must choose,
And round me mentors gathered thick and fast.

XXIV

“THIS,” one declared, “you cannot do without;”

“That,” said another, “helps you when in doubt;”

“This club,” another cried, “you’ll often use;
And that will aid in many a bitter bout!”

XXV

As does a wanderer in a wildering maze,
Deeper and deeper grew my desperate daze,
Till when I closed my eyes in sheer despair
A host of clubs went whirling dizzy ways.

XXVI

THEN came a golfer on whom knowledge sate,
Who put a surcease upon all debate;

“Each mon,” remarked he, with deliberate air,
“Duffer or no, should follow his ain gait.”

XXVII

THUS was I left unto my own device,
Save for the dealer, and I paid his price;
 But what cared I? With joy my visage gleamed
As does a boy's who tries forbidden ice.

XXVIII

I HIED me forth at sound of matin-song,
Thus to avoid the flouting of the throng;
And now it seemed the sun of Fortune beamed,
And now I deemed the world was spinning wrong.

XXIX

THE rain deterred me not. The burning heat
Could not make laggard my persistent feet.

A golfer's litany I got, and soon
Glibly could I each line of it repeat.

XXX

ONCE I had thought a "caddie" was a bird,
So like a warbler was the fluttering word;
But swift I found his patronizing tune
My own smug plumage rather roughly stirred.



HIS PATRONIZING TUNE

XXXI

THEN, after long and wearisome delay,
I fell upon a brilliant burst of play;

I did not know, alas, I did not know,
Like every dog, the duffer has his day!

XXXII

SOON came thereof the knowledge, for when next
I undertook to solve the problem vext,

Behold my pie was all of humble crow,
And how pride goeth—I recalled the text!

XXXIII

IN turn did I essay all styles of grip;
The "stance" I studied, foot and knee and hip;
As for the full perfection of the swing,
I gathered points from every learned lip.

XXXIV

My cherished lawn became a putting-green—
The parlor floor when skies were not serene;
 I bored old balls and tied them to a string,
And in seclusion banged them at a screen.

XXXV

MY best beloved declared my talk was dense,
With darksome hintings at the flight of sense;
And then—how well I mind me of the time! —
She played, she said, “in simple self defense.”

XXXVI

At length I pondered, "Men have surely writ
Of golfing both with wisdom and with wit,

Lo, I will filch the flower of prose and rhyme,
And, like a bee, make my own use of it!"

XXXVII

ASTONISHED was I at the tomes I found
In fitting hues, and hues unfitting, bound;
But woe is me! The longer that I read,
The deeper I in mental muddle drowned!

XXXVIII

WORDS, seas of words, that led when all was through
To scarce a drop of wisdom's honey-dew;

So, in vexation, to the books I said—

“Back to your niches, and ‘be hanged’ to you!”

XXXIX

BUT of the history and ancient fame
And long devotion to the noble game,—
 Of these I gathered much enlightenment,
And so not void from my excursion came.

XL

To know that once King James with Bothwell played,
That great Montrose a gallant driver made,
'Twas not for this to golfing lore I went,
And yet I honor every golfing shade.

XLI

KING CHARLES, whom some despise, although long dead,
And whom some cherish, loved the links, 'tis said;

He lost his head, though not through golf, pardie!
Yet over it have others lost the head.

XLII

MUCH may they know, these penmen who declaim
On this and that, and all with goodly aim;

But Dame Experience is the teacher, she,
When all is written, best expounds the game.

XLIII

THE “Pigtail,” the “Recoil,” the “Pendulum” —
These some effect from off the tee, and some

The “Disappointment,” as ’tis called in books,
And, soothly, swift to disappointment come!

XLIV

Who would peruse a long drawn out "Beware!"
A snare described is oft the surest snare;
 You know the adage of too many cooks.
What boots it, then, if but the day be fair?



THOUGH YOU BE BUNKERED SORE

XLV

WHAT boots it? Aye, though you be bunkered sore
When you had thought to do the hole in four,
Haply the next you may achieve in three;—
How well a three looks on a duffer's score!

XLVI

MANY the months are since the prime of year
When first I teed the ball with cynic sneer;
 An hundred fold I trust the time will be
Ere I shall cease to chase the little sphere.

XLVII

For, though I falter on the path to fame,
And ne'er in medal-play behold my name,
Nor cut a figure on the winning side,
A solace to my soul remains the game!

XLVIII

THE game remains; and I shall swear thereby,
Whate'er the season, and whate'er the "lie,"

Although it sorely crucify my pride,
And I remain a duffer till I die!

CANTO III
REALIZATION

CANTO III

XLIX

RUDDY October, robed in sunset dyes,
Sits on her throne in most imperial wise,
 Holding a golden scepter in her hand,
And with a far-off dream look in her eyes.

L

FROM out the mellow south comes wooingly
A soft breeze murmuring of the tropic sea,
And its long swell about an island-land
Where flower the citron and hibiscus-tree.

LI

AND yet amid the morning glow and glint,
The drifting wind-sigh, with its plaintive hint,
 There is a vigorous something in the air
That breathes of balsam and the tang of mint.

LII

It bids us up and out, and leave behind
The jangled nerves and the distracted mind;
It tells of new vitality, and where
He whoso wills the springs of Joy may find.

LIII

THEN let us yield us, comrade, to this lure,
Lest miser Winter grip us, pinched and poor,
And rob us of the last mite in our store
Of energy when we may work no cure!

LIV

YOUR foot with mine upon the path that leads
Far from the town where wearing turmoil breeds!

Your face with mine set upward as of yore
When boyhood danced along the hillside meads!

LV

YONDER the links lie where the lifting haze
Grows amber underneath the morning rays;

Yonder the links lie — slope and wood and stream,
And a fairway as virgin as the May's.

LVI

To see us quicken pace the goldenrod
Flings us a greeting with a friendly nod;
 And starry asters, with their eyes agleam,
Twinkle upon us from the roadside sod.

LVII

THAT radiant smile upon your lips I know
Means well-won laurels ere the sun sinks low;
And as for me, well, I'll admit I feel
Par is in danger at a hole or so.

LVIII

AH, here we are! Our mood brooks no delay;
Yours is the honour and you tee to play;
Your left hand closes with a grip of steel;
Swish! — and the ball goes soaring on its way.



CLEAR THE DREADED BUNKER

LIX

THEN I essay my skill, and fair and full
I catch the pellet with a trifling pull,
 And clear the dreaded bunker, and repose
Beyond, the ball a dot as white as wool.

LX

I AM away — an iron stroke! In two
I reach the green, and it is up to you;
Your glance and your determined pose disclose
It is the like that you intend to do.

LXI

HALVED is the hole, and now the Woodside dares
Our dual trial of its pits and snares;

What sloughs of sorrow and what perils here
Lie hid to catch the wariest unawares!

LXII

BUT on this day an inspiration seems
To guide us both, as oft before in dreams;
We cross Charybdis and pass Scylla clear,
Exultant both that Lady Fortune beams.

LXIII

THEN Westward Ho beholds your sad decline,
While Rolling Mead is witness unto mine;
But we pluck courage up at Little Mere,
Like sprinters crouching at the starting-line.

LXIV

Now I am bunkered by the Tiny Tor,
And vow strange vows (but what's a bunker for?)
Then you are plunged into the gulf Despair,
And yet we both come off the conqueror.



WHAT'S A BUNKER FOR?

LXV

So on we gayly fare, now brasseying
As blithe at heart as is the jocund Spring,
 Marking the ball's trajectory in air
As though the sphere were grown a living thing.

LXVI

At length the smooth Elysian Fields we span;
Such are all fields unto the golfing clan

 If, club in hand, they may but wander there,
Although decried as daft by many a man.

LXVII

AND so at last we turn our faces home,
Along The Valley with its soft-turfed loam;
And there is Singing Water at our side
That ever fondly seems to whisper, "Come!"

LXVIII

BUT nay, thou siren! not to-day thy charm,
However bland, can work us any harm!

The green invites us. This we have espied
Half-girdled by a steep slope's shielding arm.

LXIX

“ONE up!” you cry, in unrepressed delight,
When in the cup the round ball nestles white.

I am content to answer with a smile,
For Fate may tell another tale ere night.

LXX

Now in the arch of the October sky,
The bright procession of the noon is high;
And it is good to rest a little while,
And meat and drink are cheering, verily!

LXXI

THEN spread the napery 'neath the open blue ;
And viands bring and wine of Tuscan hue,
 And we will eat and toast the royal game
As all good golfers to Saint Andrew true.

LXXII

AND when the feast is done we will recline
Half in the shade and half within the shine,
 And to the deity of fragrant name
Raise incense-clouds, like priests before a shrine.

LXXIII

AND haply, while we lie, a lingering bird,
By golden memories of the Summer stirred,
From the seclusion of its leaf-retreat
Will drop a cadence, word on liquid word.

LXXIV

BUT never magicry, however strong,
If it do not unto the game belong,
 Can hold the golfer, for whose faithful feet
Is but one lure, and for his ears one song!

LXXV

WITH the fine zest the eager morning knew
The undulating course again we view;
 To our keen urgency responds again
The supple muscle and the springing thew.

LXXVI

WE spurn the level, and we breast the slope,
While just before us ever hastens Hope; —

 The rainbow Hope that is so often vain,
And shows us gleams of gates that never ope!

LXXVII

AND so the hours slip swiftly one by one,
While westward flames the red October sun;
The hills cast long cool shadows o'er the dale;
Holed is the last ball and the game is done.

LXXVIII

THE game is done, and whether you or I
Have won the palm-tree branch of victory,
Fair feeling and frank friendliness prevail
On the home green beneath the sunset sky.



THE GAME IS DONE

LXXIX

Ah, what a day!—rare sport, blithe company,
The heaven's healing airs about us free,
 No taint of stress, no hint of any care,
But the old taste of youth's clean buoyancy!

LXXX

AND then, what time the gathered night grows deep,
And stars, like sentinels, their vigils keep,
 Forgetfulness, whose face is ever fair,
And strength-renewal at the bourn of sleep!

CANTO IV

ENVOY

CANTO IV

LXXXI

You, the Ungolfing, who have never seen
The lofted ball fall dead upon the green,
 Who have not known the skilly putter's bliss,
Alas, alas, what sterile fields you glean!

LXXXII

THE Spring is robbed of half its triumph thrill,
For what to you the last snows on the hill!

And what the young year's apotheosis,
When brooks roar full, and April has its will!

LXXXIII

AND what the Summer orientry, and all
The pennoned pageant and the pomp of Fall!
And what the Winter sovereignty austere,
And what the earth beneath a samite pall!

LXXXIV

BUT to the Golfer even the bleak snows
That swirl without, the while the ingle glows,
Bring happy omens ; in his bosom dear
Anticipation bourgeons like a rose ;

LXXXV

OR in the embers clear-eyed Memory
Pictures some wondrous stroke from off the tee,
 Some marvelous brassie to a hidden hole,
And the inspiring magic of a three.

LXXXVI

SUCH kindling visions hold his heart elate
While wild Euroclydon is at the gate;
Content abides within his steadfast soul,
And though mayhap impatient, he can wait.

LXXXVII

YES, he can wait until the vernal chord
Is softly smitten, and the umbered sward
 Quickens beneath the sun's renewing fire,
And stripling Spring is Winter's overlord.

LXXXVIII

THEN feel his feet the tempting turf once more,
While down the distance floats his ringing "fore!"
And he is brother to the hale desire
That is of all reviving things the core.

LXXXIX

OTHERS may catch the scattered scrap and shard
Of exultation, but to them is barred

The keen elation that the Golfer knows
When Spring's first ball is teed and driven hard.

XC

HIGH ride the clouds as white as wind-tossed foam —
The Ariel clouds — across the sky's deep dome;
A day in May is goldening to its close; —
Just one more round before the sun goes home!

THE END

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